

# **You Need To Breathe**

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## You Need To Breathe by Aibohp

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**Summary:**

Bill isn't invincible, Eddie isn't helpless, and no matter how hard he tires to be someone else, Richie is always himself.

or

Bill has a panic attack. Eddie and Richie help.

# You Need To Breathe

## Author's Note:

This has nothing to do with my series [Give Me Love](#) and everything to do with the fact that [thisismydesign's](#) fic ( [Summer Time](#)) turned me onto this... triad? I mean it's not a paring if there is three of them? Whatever. Point is this is a thing now.

Also, I know not everyone experiences panic attacks the same way and I based Bill's off my own experiences with panic attacks. Usually I end up hiding in my closet rather than a hole in the ground, though.

They were in the Barrens the first time Eddie saw Bill have a panic attack. Richie had been with them. The three of them were splashing through the Kenduskeag and pretending they were on some grand safari. It was one of those few moments when they weren't concerned with Henry Bowers and his gang or the killer clown lurking in the sewers. For those few hours they were just children, playing pretend and having fun. And when they were too tired to keep hunting tigers and other such great beasts they made their way to the clubhouse. There, they sprawled out on the ground, peeling off wet shoes and socks to let them dry.

Richie started blaring songs on his radio and bickering with Eddie while Bill stared out at the stream that cut through the barrens with a notebook opened on his knee. It was summer, they were kids, and they were having fun. It was everything Eddie could want.

Then all of a sudden Bill stood up, the notebook falling to the ground.

It didn't strike Eddie that anything was wrong until Bill turned on his heel. Then the other boy got a look at his friend's face. His lips were pressed into a tight, thin line and he looked like he wanted to run away. It was a little terrifying because up until that moment Bill had always been Big Bill, their fearless leader. He was the man with the plan! But it wasn't only that. Bill never just had a plan but had a way

of making you believe it could work.

He didn't look like that person that Eddie had come to know and love then.

His eyes were huge and roved over his and Richie's faces, nostrils flared as he stuck in deep, meaningful breaths. It was like he couldn't get enough air, no matter how deeply he breathed. Eddie wondered briefly if that was what he looked like when he had an asthma attack. He was sure that he didn't look so much like a wild animal caught in a trap.

"Bill," Eddie asked hesitantly. That one utterance seemed to be what broke the camel's back.

Bill sprang into movement, looking steadfastly away from either of his friends as he made a beeline for the clubhouse. He threw open the door and then slid inside, letting it slam shut over his head. Eddie looked frantically between the clubhouse and Richie, utterly confused and a little scared by Bill's sudden, odd behavior.

"Fuck" Richie said, eyes trained on the clubhouse. He glanced quickly at Eddie and then back at the trapdoor now closed and blending into the forest floor.

"What the fuck was that about," Eddie asked, rising to his feet and taking a step toward the clubhouse, only to feel Richie's fingers hook into the waist of his pants and then pull him back. "What's wrong with him, Richie?"

The thing about Eddie was that if he had been a compass, Bill would have been his true North. Maybe it was because Bill was his best friend. Or it could have been that Eddie loved him, though all the Losers loved Bill to some degree. He was easy to love being tall and handsome as he was. There was something else about him, though. Something that was nearly irresistible. Whatever it was, it was what had the Losers drawn to him like moths to a flame, willing to follow him wherever he may lead. The only person who came close to inspiring the same feeling was Beverly. It was something that was quite similar, yet very different about the two. While Bill could lead them on a march through Hell, Beverly would be the one to keep

them together. She was guiding hand in the dark, a shepherdess keeping their flock in line.

Whatever the reason, it ultimately resulted in Eddie liking to keep an eye on Bill. He was the first to notice when he went missing and privately he ultimately knew the most about their leader. The only problem with that theory was that bill was great at making people see what *he* wanted. Some things Eddie hadn't been let in on at all.

That was where Richie came in.

"He's... Fine," Richie said, a gaping canyon of uncertainty between the first word and the last, as if he wasn't sure. With a sigh, he rose from where they had been settled on the ground, shaded by the dappling of leaves. "He just-- Listen Eds, Bill isn't as invincible as we make him out to be sometimes," he said awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck as he edged closer to the clubhouse with every word. "He's fine! Or he will be. It's just a panic attack."

It was a pitiful attempt at assurance but it was all Eddie got before Richie disappeared into the clubhouse with Bill, leaving Eddie alone. Neither redheaded boy had told him that he wasn't allowed in the clubhouse but it was heavily implied. That didn't stop Eddie from making his way to the very edge, where the door met the earth and listening.

"Bill, Hey buddy calm down. I say, I say calm down son! You ain't neva gonna catch yo breath breathin like that!" Richie, definitely Richie. No matter how hard he tried to be someone else he always sounded like himself.

"I c-c-c-c-c... I c-caa... I caa-aa-aan-n-n't." Bill's stutter was worse than Eddie had ever heard it. It was a miracle that he planned to get the words out at all. His breathing wasn't helping at all. Even from his place outside the clubhouse, Eddie could hear the quick, panicked gasps. "I-it-it-it.. I-i-i-it-it-it's m-m-m-my.. Mu-mu-mu..."

"Shut it, Denbrough," Richie suddenly said with a sharpness that Eddie rarely heard from the other boy. "I know what you're about to say and it isn't your fault. What happened to Georgie isn't on you it's on IT. It's not like you yanked his arm off and stuffed him in the

storm drain yourself.”

Eddie pinched the bridge of his nose. Really Tozier? Richie wasn't really a bad guy but he lacked any sort of tact. But then there must be something to his methods because Bill had let him see this part of him but not Eddie. That stung a little. Eddie had tried so hard to try and shield Bill from anything pertaining to Georgie after the boy died. Sure they had all been friends before but they didn't hang out like this. Before he and Bill had been best buds. He had been the one that distracted Bill from thinking about Georgie or steered others away from the topic during conversations. That wasn't to say that he hated having the rest of the Losers around. With them Eddie felt more powerful than his mother ever allowed him to be.

The thought of his mother made Eddie wince. He had been acting a lot like his mother with Bill, hadn't he? Trying to protect him from everything that had to do with his brother. There had to be some way he could help, though. After all, it seemed Richie was having no luck. Bill's stuttering had reached such a point that he wasn't even trying to talk. Every single time he opened his mouth the only thing that made it out was a mess of spittle as he tried and failed to rien in his words and make them come understandable.

“Shit, Bill. Stop trying to talk! I-I don't know what to do but you need to try and breathe!”

He was trying. Eddie could hear him. They had gone from quick rabbit-fast breaths to the ones from before, those deep but ultimately useless drags of air. Above ground, Eddie was wracking his brain, trying to remember if he'd ever read anything about panic attacks and if he had, what it was. Unfortunately, nothing was was coming to him, at least not about panic attacks. Hyperventilation was a familiar term, however.

As a child with asthma and a hyper paranoid mother he was well informed on most breathing problems. Eddie often took it upon himself to read up on those things since it seemed to him to be the only thing that was actually wrong with him. Most of the pills he took because if he didn't his mother would cry and sob and beg the question, “*Why are you doing this to me, Eddie?*” And since her medical knowledge was unreliable at best he did some of his own research.

What that really boiled down to was that he could help.

“Guys, I’m coming in,” Eddie said, lifting the door at the same time.

Bill looked up at him, panicked, though the real horror was in Richie’s face. The two of them were huddled in the clubhouse, Richie’s arms wrapped around Bill and holding him close. Bill’s face had been resting on Richie’s shoulder and when he was done staring at Eddie, he shoved his face into the other boy’s neck, only to be pushed back. He let out a keening whine and reached for Richie again, even as the boy was scooting back.

“Eddie! Uh.. It’s not what you think,” Richie asked, looking almost more panicked than Bill.

“Whatever Trashmouth,” Eddie replied. He didn’t care to deal with Richie right now. Sliding into the clubhouse, Eddie sat next to Bill, putting his small hand on the boy’s shoulder as the door slammed shut above them. “You need to breathe, Bill.”

“Nnnn,” Bill whined, pulling his knees to his chest since Richie was currently denying him anyone to hold onto. His chest was expanding and then collapsing over and over. Eddie could feel every heave under the hand on Bill’s shoulder.

“I know. Lay down,” Eddie said urgently, pushing against Bill’s shoulder until he complied. He couldn’t see very well in the dark but he could feel Richie’s eyes on him. “You’re breathing too shallow and up in your chest. You need to breathe in your stomach,” Eddie said, muttering to himself as he ran his hand down from Bill’s shoulder, over his chest, and then letting it rest on the boy’s stomach. “Try to push my hand up when you breathe this time.”

He wasn’t sure if Bill was listening at first. His breaths were still coming too fast and shallow. Every now and then Eddie felt his friend’s stomach twitch under his hand but it felt like forever before he felt the hand that he was pressing down against Bill’s abdomen rise. Things started to get better from there. Slowly, Bill’s breathing got slower and meaningful. When he finally got himself under control he rolled onto his side and Eddie’s hand ended up on his side.

“I-I-I-I’m s-s-sor-r-rry” Bill said quietly, his voice meek. It broke Eddie’s heart.

“You don’t have to be sorry. What was all that about,” Eddie asked, voice quiet.

“He was thinking about Georgie,” Richie said, earning a glare from Eddie, not that the other boy would be able to see it. He didn’t try to shut him up like he usually would either. No more being so overprotective. “He thinks it’s his fault that he died.”

“It-It-it is! I-I-If I ha-a-ad never made--made that stu-stu-stupid bu-bu-boat,” Bill started, ending the stuttered sentence with a dull thump of his fist hitting the earthen wall in front of him. “H-he-he’s never c-c-coming ba-back. I-I-I.. Argh FUCK!”

Eddie frowned rubbing his hand over Bill’s side in what he hoped was a comforting gesture. He knew how much Bill hated his stutter, hated how it made it so hard for him to communicate. There was a shuffling to Eddie’s right and he felt Richie’s presence as he came closer. Bill leaned back toward him a little and Eddie had to assume that Richie was finally touching him again.

“If you hadn’t built him that boat then Georgie wouldn’t have died that day but you aren’t the one that killed him,” Richie insisted. Bill sniffled quietly in response and Eddie wished he could fucking see.

“It isn’t like that would have meant that Georgie would have lived anyway. Whatever IT does, it has been taking kids all Summer. It might have gotten Georgie too! And if IT hadn’t then where would we be,” Eddie added after a moment’s hesitation. Two sets of eyes were resting heavily on him, even if none of them could see, they could feel each other and he knew it. “And all the other kids in Derry. It’s like you and Bev have been saying. Only we can do anything about it, right? The adults don’t seem to see it and all the other kids... they just die. Maybe Georgie had to die so we could come together and kill IT? There had to be seven of us before we could.”

His voice got uncertain and tapered off toward the end, his hand curling tight into Bill’s shirt. Eddie was scared beyond belief that Bill



would be angry with him. He'd sounded so callous. He'd made it sound like it was a good thing that Georgie was pushing up daisies in the cemetery right now. Fucking hell.

"M-m-maybe y-you're right." Bill said after a moment, voice quiet and tired. "Y-y-you guys f-feel it-it-it too, r-right? Like th-th-there's something el-el-else out there? So-something o-other th-than IT," he said quietly, hand creeping around to lay over Eddie's, grabbing his wrist. "It-It-It needs us t-t-to k-kill what-whatever I-I-IT is."

Everything was quiet for a moment as the three boys contemplated what their friend had said. There was no denying that there was some other force driving them forward. Over the Summer, as the Losers had found each other they had become something Other, something different. It was in the way they felt a rift between themselves and the other children in Derry. And Eddie had seen more than once how the adults would look at them, like they were something to be feared. Whatever it was that changed them, Eddie could feel it sometimes, if he let himself. It was like a gaping feeling in his chest, like something had pried him open and making a home for itself, or maybe letting some inner power he had in himself run free.

"I-I-I'm scu-scu-scared," Bill piped up, breaking the silence. His hand tightened around Eddie's wrist. "I-I feel--feel like I-I'm g-going t-t-to get you guys k-k-killed." The unspoken 'just like Georgie' rang loud and clear through their little clubhouse.

"Don't worry about that," Richie said firmly. Eddie could hear him shuffling around again. "Dalin' I say don't worry about it. 'S'long as we have all seven of us we'll be fine, see? Just peachie keen Dalin' peachy keen."

"I.. What even was that supposed to be, Richie? You sound like you have a head cold," Eddie said, bursting into laughter. Bill joined in and their friend huffed indignantly.

"What you guys can't tell Humphrey Bogart when you hear him? Classablanca," Richie asked, making the other two cackle even louder. By the time they got their chuckles under control again, Eddie was wheezing and had to take a pull off his inhaler while Bill shook

and gasped, trying to calm down again.

“Wh-what time is i-i-it,” Bill asked, letting out a yawn. “I-I’m tired.”

Eddie moved first, touching along the door above them until he found the little window they’d fixed up. After propping it open he sat in the resulting shaft of light and checked his watch. Not even thirty minutes had passed since Bill’s panic attack had started. Glancing over at the other boys he saw that Bill had curled himself up against the wall of the clubhouse and Richie had moved to sit by his head. Bill’s head had found it’s way into Richie’s lap as well and he was running his fingers through Bill’s soft, coppery hair. Eddie caught Richie’s gaze and arched a brow. The bespectacled boy looked away first, like he felt ashamed or embarrassed but wasn’t willing to give up the feel of Bill’s hair between his fingers.

Eddie couldn’t blame him.

Leaving the window cracked open, Eddie crawled back over to his friends, sitting at Bill’s back again. Bill slowly rolled onto his side so he could face the small, earth room and reached out to take a hold of Eddie’s hand again. There were fresh tear tracks cutting through the smudges of dirt on his cheeks and the sight broke Eddie’s heart.

“You should take a nap,” Eddie said quietly, watching as Bill blinked oh so slowly. His normally sharp, blue eyes looked tired. “We still have time before we gotta get home and you’re probably tired after earlier.”

Bill nodded his head slowly, rubbing his cheek into Richie’s thigh. Then he did something entirely unexpected. He let go of Eddie’s hand and then reached up to grab the sleeve of his shirt, tugging on him until Eddie laid down in front of him. If that wasn’t enough he threw his arm around the other boy’s waist and dragged him in close. For a moment, Eddie felt like a teddy bear, his back pressed against Bill’s chest and the other boy’s chin brushing the top of his head.

“S-s-sorry. I just--I just n-n-need,” Bill started to stutter, squeezing Eddie tightly and worming his left arm under Eddie’s side. His voice slowly quieted, though, like he wasn’t sure what he wanted to say.

"It's fine, Bill," Eddie said quietly, tilting his head to look up at Richie who seemed embarrassed still. Why, the smaller boy would never know. He was the one getting manhandled and snuggled like a living stuffed animal. Richie was just handsy pillow.

"Th-th-th-thank y-you." Bill muttered quietly into the top of Eddie's head and that was it.

They all sat in silence for a while, or at least until Bill's breath evened out and his grip on Eddie's waist loosened to the point his left arm let go completely. It was probably going to go numb with someone laying on it but neither Eddie nor Richie wanted to risk waking Bill up so they could move it for him. Eddie also just didn't want to move. Even he was staring to get tired after all the excitement. Also, it didn't hurt being held and cuddled by Bill. Eddie didn't realize how much he wanted that until he had it. Now he didn't know what he'd do if he was never allowed to have this feeling again.

But there was one last thing he had to do before he fell asleep.

"You know it doesn't matter, right, Richie," Eddie said, lifting his hand to yawn against his palm.

"What are you talking about," Richie asked, frown evident in his voice.

"Earlier, when you were hugging Bill, what you said? That it wasn't what it looked like? It doesn't matter if it is, at least not to me. The others probably wouldn't care either," Eddie said. He tucked his arm under his head and closed his eyes.

"It doesn't," Richie mumbled quietly and Eddie shook his head.

"Nah.. I can't say shit about it. I love him too."

If Richie said anything after that, Eddie didn't hear him. He had fallen asleep. Though he might have sworn that he felt someone's fingers in his hair just before he drifted off.